

## Interpretation of Judaculla Rock

Judaculla Rock, located in western North Carolina, is a large soapstone boulder whose surface is covered with carvings. The rock has sometimes been described as depicting a map of a battle in 1755 between the Cherokee and their enemies. Some people believe this battle was between the Cherokee and the Creek Nation, while others believe the Cherokee fought with the Catawba. In reality, the carvings are probably much older. Archaeologists studying soapstone quarries believe the Judaculla Rock was probably carved during the time archaeologists call the Late Archaic, which dates from 3000 to 1000 BC. Outcrops of soapstone, used by Native Americans in the past to sculpt pipes, beads, bowls, and bannerstones, are located near the Judaculla Rock. Archaeologists think Native Americans camped at, or near, the rock when they came to quarry the stone.

James Mooney, a researcher at the Smithsonian Institution who collected southern Indian stories, recorded the Cherokee legend of Judaculla Rock in the 1880s. According to Mooney's story, a being named Judaculla (called by the Cherokee *Tsul-ka-lu*, or the Great Slant-eyed Giant) was a giant hunter who lived atop a mountain at the head of the Tuckaseegee River in Jackson County. Judaculla was very powerful and could control the wind, rain, thunder, and lightning. The carvings on the boulder represent scratches made by Judaculla's feet as he jumped from the top of the mountain to the creek below. The seven-toed foot at the lower right hand side of the boulder is said to depict Judaculla's footprint.

The actual meanings of the Judaculla Rock symbols are a mystery. It is possible these figures may represent humans, animals, or figures of religious importance. As late as the 1880s and 1890s, Cherokee groups would assemble at Judaculla Rock to hold ceremonies. Today the land around the Judaculla Rock has been turned into a small park, where visitors can view the boulder and ponder its meaning.